

Thomas Jefferson Walling Log Cabin
Henderson
Rusk County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3321

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Rocky Mountain Region National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Denver, Colorado 80225

THOMAS JEFFERSON WALLING LOG CABIN

HABS No. TX-3321

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Location: Originally the cabin was located 10 miles northeast of Henderson, south of Texas State Highway 43. The cabin is to be rebuilt and restored at a new location in the city of Henderson, Rusk County, Texas

Date of Construction: 1841

Present Owner: Rusk County Historical Commission

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: The cabin is to be restored by the Rusk County Historical Commission for use as an educational display.

Significance: The Walling cabin is considered to be an excellent example of the early pioneer Vernacular architecture of east Texas. The cabin was erected in 1841 by the original land grantee. It is the only such structure that is known to survive from the era of the Republic of Texas in Rusk County.

Historian: Hank Moncure - Texas Archaeological Survey
Virginia Knapp - Rusk County Historical Commission
Dick Robertson - Texas Utilities Services Inc.

HISTORIC INFORMATION

The Walling cabin is considered to be an excellent example of the early pioneer vernacular architecture of east Texas. The cabin was erected in 1841 by the original land grantee. It is the only such structure that is known to survive from the era of the Republic of Texas in Rusk County. The cabin has been nominated and determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The original cabin site is 10 miles northeast of Henderson, Texas, south of Texas State Highway 43 on a Texas Utilities Generating Company railroad right-of-way. The cabin logs were dismantled in 1982 and are currently (March 1983) in storage in Henderson. The Rusk County Historical Commission owns the cabin and plans to rebuild and restore it for use as a museum.

The builder, Thomas Jefferson Walling, was born in White County, Tennessee in 1811. In January 1836 he joined his two brothers John and Jesse Walling, in Nacogdoches, Texas where he took the oath of allegiance to the Texas Republic. Until 1840 he lived near that city. In 1841 he claimed land near Henderson, Texas in Rusk County. He was among the 150 men who marched with Thomas J. Rusk in putting down the so-called Cordova Rebellion in 1838 (Webb, Handbook of Texas; vol. II, 858; Vol. I, 412). All three brothers, plus several near relations, are mentioned in individual entries in the Handbook of Texas.

The Thomas J. Walling family sold this house and the lands near Henderson in 1859 and moved further west to Hill county. The town of Walling in that county is named for the family. The house and 307 acres surrounding it were sold to John Harrison in 1859. A contract made by Harrison's widow, Catherine, in 1867, specifically states that the house was that which was formerly occupied by T. J. Walling. (Rusk County Probate File #729). The entire contents of the house at that time are listed in an inventory of the Harrison estate. This inventory should prove to be a valuable guide to furnishing the cabin as an educational display, because its contents can be documented so accurately.

The importance of illustrating the lifeway of the majority of southern yeomen farmers, rather than the life of a few members of an economic elite, whose great mansions have survived, make this modest cabin of particular importance to the heritage of Rusk County and of East Texas, as a whole.

The basic cabin is nearly square, 20 feet across the front by 19 feet deep (outside measurement), in the classic English style (Bealer 1978: 23). The centered front door is symmetrically flanked by two windows. The hearth wall (east wall) to the right as one enters, has a low-placed, very small window to the left of the chimney which may have served to pass logs inside from a woodpile just outside. The other gable wall (west wall) contains the centered door to the side shed room. Tool marks indicate this

door was produced by enlarging a window. The back (north) wall contains a door which aligns with the right front window and which allows entry into the add-on rear shed room. It appears, from hinge evidence and the closure latch position, that this door may be contemporary with the construction of the shed room and not an original feature of the cabin. Most often doors were hung so as to swing out from the house and not reduce available indoor space. This one opened into the main cabin pen.

The original walls are constructed of pine logs, hand hewn to thick flat timbers. Some have been left half rounded. These logs are generally about 12 inches in original diameter. Corner notching is of the square type. The exterior of the cabin shows the use of weatherboards, horizontally placed, to cover the interstices between the logs. The square notched cornering method employed lacks the self locking feature of most other notch types but was held in place by vertically placed, narrow boards which may also have acted as furring strips for the weatherboards. Later weatherboards, as indicated by circular saw marks, are the majority of those remaining. Rabbed edge joinery of the weatherboards, such as that present in many cases, would have been possible at the date of the first construction but it appears likely that this feature belongs to those weatherboards which replaced the originals. First priority would have gone to covering the spaces between the logs (there is no evidence of chinking or luting) and complete outside covering with weatherboard would follow when there was time to plumb the walls. Indeed, evidence of cutting and shimming of the log walls to allow the support of vertical furring strips lends support to the above.

There is evidence of at least four roofs. Shakes, shingles, composition shingles and a corrugated galvanized iron roof are present. There are large, untapered shakes free riven from cypress; smaller, slightly tapered in length, shingles of the same wood; and red composition asphalt-type commercial shingles. It appears that the roof boards to which these are attached in layers may be remnants of the earliest roof.

The plank floor currently in the original pen, the rear shed room and the side shed room is probably not original but, within the original pen, is nailed to the original log floor joists. Saw marks from a rotary saw on many of these planks point to their being replacements.

This documentation has been prepared by Texas Utilities Services Inc. (TUSI) in accordance with a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) of the EPA, Texas State Historic Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The MOA was developed during preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement for Martin Lake Area D Lignite Surface Mine and railroad in Rusk County, Texas.

Principal References

Moncure, H.B. and J. Jackson. 1982. A Cultural Resource Survey of the Proposed Martin Lake Area D Railroad and Transmission Line, Rusk County, Texas. Texas Archaeological Survey, Research Report No. 57. University of Texas at Austin.

Moncure, H.B. 1983. Mitigation of Walling Cabin. Report under preparation by Texas Archaeological Survey, University of Texas at Austin.

National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form.
February 17, 1982. U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service.

Webb, Walter P. 1952. The Handbook of Texas, Vol II. The Texas State Historical Association, Austin.